149: Reinach--101a G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

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Fig. 36 /p.135/ Typical Khas of the province of Stung-Treng.

776 "The Laotians also believe that there are people who are possessed
771 by the demon or who have [151] the evil eye. They call them 'Phi-
791 pop.' When a person or family in a village is so regarded by the other inhabitants, they are forced to move and to go and live in one of the villages composed exclusively of Phi-pop" (1).

(1) Le Laos français, op. cit. [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

The boatmen and folk who dwell along the watercourses also believe in the existence of certain particular beings, as for example the Siren or "Nguoc." The siren, whom some people claim to have seen (?), is said to have the form of a snake with paws and an enormous head surmounted by a red, saw-toothed crest. It is supposed to have seven nostrils in a single nose, and a mouth provided with several rows of teeth. The scales which cover it and the lobes of its tail are said to be able to clash against one another and make a great deal of noise.

791 In times of public calamity, the "Tho-Nguoc" assumes a human voice and announces important events or cataclysms to come.

154 The "Phi-pop," to whom we have referred above, have, according
683 to popular belief, the power of casting spells and causing the death of animals and even persons by means of their incantations, their practices or their glance. The natives say that they can reduce a buffalo hide to the size of a grain of rice and thus make a person swallow it. Once in the stomach the hide is supposed to regain its natural volume and cause the death of the person who has swallowed it by making the stomach burst after intolerable suffering. It goes without saying that the "Phi-pop" who is the cause of the evil can, in return for certain gifts, arrest the suffering and deliver the patient before death overtakes him. A person who believes he has swallowed a buffalo hide falls prey to a kind of madness and commits all sorts of extravagances, to such a point that his neighbors try to get him out of the village and get rid of him, for he has become a "Phi-pop" in his turn. People claim that there is only one way to find out if a man is possessed, and that is to throw him into the water with his feet and hands tied. If he floats he is not possessed, but if [152] the opposite proves to be the case--and this is what invariably happens--then a "Phi-pop" is really present and his disappearance is regarded as a blessing.

as a blessing. 791

One fact worthy of note is that the "Phi-pop"--men, women and even adolescents--are extremely intelligent folk with lively eyes and full of a strong will and energy. They know [Illustration here] a host of recipes and therapeutic formulas which have been handed down to them by their parents. They might be described as bonesetters or people who have medicine as a sideline, and who act on weak minds and nervous temperaments by the power of suggestion. "Phi-pop" women and girls are usually quite pretty. 755 156

One of the methods most widely used to gain the favor of the "Phis" is to play deafening music. 755 533

"It is not at all unusual to hear diabolic and uninterrupted music in a Laotian house for several days and nights running. In this house there is a person who is seriously ill. All the noise is designed to frighten or to assuage the spirit in the sick person's body and to persuade or force it to [153] leave the body of the invalid. The sick person generally succumbs under the waves of this curative but noisy harmony" (1).

(1) Le Laos français, op. cit. [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.] [113]

Religion of the Thais. They have neither pagodas nor bonzes, but practice ancestor worship and have a great veneration for the "Spirits or Genii," to whom they make offerings on all occasions. 771 769

In the first room of the house there stands a bamboo altar. The "Spirits" or "Phis" of dead forbears are supposed to inhabit this altar, which is composed of two different levels, the highest one for the male Phis and the other for the female Phis. At its foot there is an opening covered with an elliptical wooden ornament shaped like a mouth. It is there, on this "ancestors' mouth," that the head of the family places offerings and prayers, especially when a member of the family is sick. In principal an animal is never killed without some scrap of food or a few drops of blood being offered to the ancestors' mouth.

"Spirits, whether genii or demons, are everywhere--in the sky, on earth, in the forests, in the water. They are the object of a widespread cult over which individuals who might be described as 776 793 755